

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

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R 230335Z MAR 78

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3382

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANILA 4693

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, RP

SUBJECT: LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS: OPPOSITION GAINS CONTINUE
IN MANILA

REF: MANILA 4260

1. SUMMARY: THE GOVERNMENT'S KBL PARTY IS REELING UNDER AN IMPRESSIVE OUTPOURING OF POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THE OPPOSITION FOLLOWING BENIGNO AQUINO'S REMARKABLE TELECAST FROM DETENTION MARCH 10. PRESIDENT MARCOS ALSO WAS FORCED TO DEFEND HIS WIFE'S ABILITY TO SUCCEED HIM, WHILE SHE PROTESTED SHE WOULDN'T WANT TO. SEVERAL PRIVATE POLLS REPORTEDLY INDICATE SIGNIFICANT OPPOSITION SUPPORT IN A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT SECTORS IN MANILA. END SUMMARY.

2. SUPPORTERS AND CANDIDATES OF THE OPPOSITION LABAN GROUP EXUDE CONFIDENCE THAT, EVEN IF THEY ARE ULTIMATELY NOT PERMITTED TO WIN SEATS IN THE INTERIM LEGISLATURE (IBP), THEIR MESSAGE IS GENERATING WIDESPREAD POPULAR SUPPORT (MANILA 4687). MOST EMBASSY SOURCES ATTRIBUTE THE GROWING LABAN APPEAL TO THE GOP'S CLUMSY EFFORTS TO DISCREDIT LABAN STAR BENIGNO AQUINO, WHICH HAVE APPARENTLY SERVED ONLY TO PRESENT HIM AS A RESPECTABLE ALTERNATIVE LEADER WHO HAS BEEN TREATED UNFAIRLY. THE GOVERNMENT'S KBL
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GROUP SEEMS AT THE MOMENT TO BE ON THE DEFENSIVE. IT IS RELYING PRIMARILY ON PROMISING MORE GOVERNMENT BENEFITS TO THE DISADVANTAGED, PUBLICIZING EXPRESSIONS OF SUPPORT BY VARIOUS GROUPS, AND REVIVING THE "FOREIGN MEDDLING" THEME (MANILA 4486). IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHAT STOPS MARCOS AND THE KBL WILL PULL OUT TO REVERSE THE TIDE AFTER THE EASTER PAUSE IN THE CAMPAIGN.

3. THE AQUINO ISSUE WAS GENERALLY DOWNPLAYED BY THE GOVERNMENT AND THE GUIDED MEDIA LAST WEEK, BUT PRESIDENT AND MRS. MARCOS EACH HAD A FEW BARBED COMMENTS ABOUT HIM. MARCOS SAID MARCH 16 THAT AQUINO WOULD NOT BE ELIGIBLE FOR AMNESTY AS A SUBVERSIVE SINCE HE IS ALSO ACCUSED OF THE "ORDINARY CRIMES" OF MURDER AND ILLEGAL POSSESSION OF FIREARMS, WHICH CAN ONLY BE THE SUBJECT OF A PARDON. ON MARCH 18 HE CHIDED LABAN FOR "BEGGING FOR SYMPATHY VOTES FOR AQUINO." THE ONLY PROPER ISSUE IN THE ELECTION, HE SAID, IS THE CONTINUANCE OF THE NEW SOCIETY, "WHICH SOULD OVERRIDE FEELINGS OF MERCY FOR ANY MAN." IF AQUINO NEEDS MERCY, HE SAID, HE COULD BE GIVEN A PARDON. "I WILL BE THE ONE TO GIVE HIM CLEMENCY BECAUSE IT IS IN MY HANDS." HE ASSERTED THAT AQUINO IS RUNNING NOT TO WIN AN IBP SEAT BUT TO FORCE THE ISSUE OF WHETHER A POPULAR MANDATE COULD WIPE OUT HIS CRIMINAL LIABILITY. HE ADDED THAT HE BELIEVED AQUINO COULD NOT JOIN THE LEGISLATURE ONCE HE IS CONVICTED OF CRIMES. MRS. MARCOS TOLD THE MANILA LIONS CLUB THE SAME DAY THAT RELEASING AQUINO HAD GRAVE IMPLICATIONS. SHE WARNED THAT THE FILIPINO PEOPLE THEMSELVES MIGHT BECOME PRISONERS IF AQUINO WAS RELEASED, CITING ALLEGATIONS THAT HE IS LINKED TO THE COMMUNISTS AND IS "PLAYING BALL" WITH THE CIA. NEVERTHELESS, BULLETIN TODAY COLUMNIST BIGNORIA NOTED "GROWING SYMPATHY AMONG VOTERS" FOR AQUINO MARCH 21. CONFIDENTIAL

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4. THE PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION QUESTION BECAME AN ELECTION ISSUE MARCH 15, WHEN LABAN CANDIDATE SOC RODRIGO ASSERTED ON TELEVISION THAT MRS. MARCOS IS RUNNING TO HAVE HERSELF CHOSEN DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND THIS BE IN LINE TO SUCCEED HER HUSBAND. THE FOLLOWING DAY THE PRESIDENT CALLED RODRIGO'S COMMENTS "VENOMOUS ALLEGATIONS", SAYING THAT A PRESIDENTIAL DECREE FOR TEMPORARY JOINT LEADERSHIP BY A COMMITTEE OF CABINET MEMBERS AND OTHERS IN THE EVENT OF HIS DEATH IS ALREADY ON FILE. MRS. MARCOS, HE SAID, NEED NOT BE AN IBP MEMBER TO BECOME HIS SUCCESSOR. "YOU KNOW VERY WELL SHE IS MORE POWERFUL AS A GOVERNOR, AND SHE WILL PROBABLY BE IN A BETTER POSITION TO ASPIRE FOR A SUCCESSION AS METRO MANILA GOVERNOR." SUPREME COURT JUSTICE BARREDO CONTRADICTED HIM, HOWEVER, SAYING IN CEBU MARCH 18 THAT ONLY THE

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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3383

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MANILA 4693

IBP COULD CHOOSE A NEW PRIME MINISTER OR PRESIDENT.
"THE MUCH-FETED SECRET PRESIDENTIAL DECREE ON SUCCESSION,
TO BE OPENED ONLY ON THE OCCURRENCE OF THE PROPER
CONTINGENCY, HAS CEASED TO BE RELEVANT AND OF FORCE."
ALSO ON MARCH 18, MRS. MARCOS INSISTED TO THE LIONS THAT
"THE MOMENT PRESIDENT MARCOS IS OUT OF THE GOVERNMENT,
I STEP OUT WITH HIM."

5. SEVERAL ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS BY MARCOS HAVE DRAWN
LABAN CHARGES OF INTIMIDATION. MARCOS ANNOUNCED OVER
THE WEEKEND THAT DEPARTMENT HEADS SHOULD FIRE EMPLOYEES
WHO DO NOT BELIEVE IN THE GOALS OF THE NEW SOCIETY.
(KBL SPOKESMAN J.V. CRUZ LATER INSISTED THAT THIS
WAS PART OF MARCOS' ONGOING EFFORTS TO RID THE GOVERNMENT OF
SUBVERSIVES AND WAS NOT RELATED TO THE ELECTIONS,) LABAN
ALSO COMPLAINED ABOUT A QUESTIONNAIRE BEING
CIRCULATED TO ALL CIVIL SERVANTS ASKING FOR THE NAMES
OF ALL THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS AND HOUSEHOLD HELP AND THEIR
VOTING PRECINCT. LABAN LEADERS SAY PRIVATELY, THOUGH,
THAT SUCH HEAVY-HANDED GOP TACTICS OFTEN SERVE TO CREATE
PRO-LABAN REACTION. LABAN HAS NOTED PUBLICLY THAT RECENT
MARCOS ANNOUNCEMENTS -- PROVIDING PAY RAISES TO SCHOOL
TEACHERS, FREEZING TUITION RATES AT PRIVATE SCHOOLS,
DISTRIBUTING CHEAP LAND TO URBAN SQUATTERS, AND INCREASING
CIVIL SERVANT'S PENSIONS -- ARE ALREADY PROOF OF THE
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VALUE OF A STRONG OPPOSITION.

6. EX-SEANTOR SGONGA AND OTHERS HAVE TOLD THE EMBASSY
THE GOVERNMENT IS BRINGING LARGE NUMBERS OF PROVINCIAL
RESIDENTS FROM AREAS WHERE THE KBL HAS LITTLE OPPOSITION

TO MANILA TO RAISE THE KBL TURNOUT. BULLETIN TODAY'S
BIGNOAIR HAS ALSO NOTED THAT "ADMINISTRATION VOTE-GETTERS
HAVE BEEN SUMMONED TO MANILA FOR THEIR VARIOUS NO-CONTEST
RACES IN THE VARIOUS REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY TO HELP
CAMPAIGN FOR THE KBL BETS IN METRO MANILA." LABAN EXPECTS
CONSIDERABLE VOTE FRAUD AND IS CONDUCTING SEMINARS FOR
ITS POLL-WATCHERS. IT HOPES TO HAVE AT LEAST THREE
WATCHERS IN EACH OF MANILA'S 11,000 PRECINCTS.

7. WE HAVE HEARD OF A NUMBER OF PRIVATE POLLS PREDICTING
ELECTION RESULTS IN METRO MANILA. MARCOS ANNOUNCED
MARCH 16 THAT A PRIVATE POLL SHOWED THE KBL WINNING
HANDILY, WITH ALL OF LABAN FAR DOWN AMONG THE LOSERS. A
MALACANANG INSIDER HAS TOLD US, HOWEVER, THAT THE POLL
ACTUALLY SHOWED MRS. MARCOS PLACING SEVENTH, TRAILING
AQUINO AND SEVERAL OTHER LABAN CANDIDATES. A STRAW VOTE
AMONG UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES STUDENTS REPORTEDLY
SHOWED ALL LABAN CANDIDATES WINNING BY A VAST
MAJORITY. A POLL OF FORMER STUDENT EDITORS LAST WEEK
GAVE LABAN 19 SEATS AND KBL TWO, WITH MRS. MARCOS PLACING
27TH. A POLL OF CENTRAL BANK EMPLOYEES, WE ARE TOLD,
SHOWED LABAN WINNING ALL 21 SEATS.
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